

DECONSTRUCTING QUEER SETTLER COLONIALISM

Brian Joseph Gilley

Spaces between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization

Scott Lauria Morgensen

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 336 pp.

The relationship between queer indigenous peoples and nonindigenous queers has a complicated history. Scholarship on queer indigenous peoples also has a legacy tied to misrepresentation and objectification. Until now, no scholar has effectively presented an actionable critique incorporating both popular gay cultural appropriation of indigenous queer heritages and a theoretical apparatus with which to deconstruct knowledge produced about queer indigenous peoples. In Scott Lauria Morgensen's *Spaces between Us*, "queer settler colonialism" is the analytic cornerstone of a new approach for denaturalizing the gender and sexuality legacies of colonialism. Central to this project for Morgensen is identifying as a non-Native scholar and a queer critic of non-Native queers who invoke Native heritage for white settler gay liberation. This positioning is, in and of itself, an ethical act of decolonization explicitly tied to a disjuncturing of queer settler claims to indigenous pasts. Within this positioning lies the inspiration for an innovative approach to queer scholarship and queer intellectual methodology, with implications beyond gender and sexuality studies.

The central tenets of *Spaces between Us* are outlined in part 1, "Genealogies," which is a two-chapter archaeology of settler-derived homonormative discourses and a framing of Native resistance to the homosocial uses of primitivism. White sexual minorities, according to Morgensen, are little different than other white settler subjects who have incorporated primitivity into a national identity. This national identity is constructed ideologically and spatially within acts of colonial appropriation of both Native culture and land. For example, in Morgensen's analysis, Harry Hay's appropriation of the "berdache" tradition for homophile

activism and gay cultural production would be considered an act of colonization. This single rereading of homophile primitivism is a bold stance in queer studies. However, once the reader fully grasps Morgensen's theoretical use of settler logics against their own effects, an entirely new and innovative understanding of sex and gender colonialism opens. The application of these ideas to knowledge produced about Native queer history, the history of queer "back to the land" counterculture, and Two-Spirit organizing further extend the reach of the analysis to completely reshape current understandings of critical moments in both queer indigenous and queer settler culture.

In part 2, "Movements," Morgensen applies the theoretical apparatus to Native gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and Two-Spirit (GLBTQ2) social movements and GLBTQ homophile primitivist movements. Part 2 is not a one-dimensional critique of white queer homophiles, nor is it a romanticized celebration of indigenous queers. Rather, what emerges is a conversation between indigenous queer decolonization and the uses of Native culture and lands by white queer settlers. Land occupied by white settlers and stolen from Natives (read queer Natives) is analyzed through parallel spatial claims embedded in culturally specific acts of indigeneity. The chapters in this section draw on ethnographic observations of GLBTQ2 people and homophile settlers "in power-laden conversation." The best application of Morgensen's analysis comes in chapter 4 where Morgensen attempts to sort through the complex relationship between whiteness, queers of color, and "the settler colonial relationship to Native peoples and land" (146). We come to understand the possibility that queers of color and GLBTQ2 people use Radical Faerie culture to mark as well as displace whiteness. Thus these forms of difference—race and indigeneity—are reliant on each other in that GLBTQ2 people readily adapt Radical Faerie culture into their work for decolonization. In chapter 5, Morgensen translates the complexity of this relationship into transnational indigenous contexts where Two-Spirit critiques of settler queer primitivism challenge settler colonialism as well as "globalist desires."

Moving from a sense of conversation between settler and Native, we arrive at chapter 6, "Together We Are Stronger," which brings the conversation of decolonization to explicitly indigenous contexts. The focus of this chapter is the way in which Two-Spirit AIDS organizing represents a quintessential act of decolonization where GLBTQ2 Natives defend sovereignty by opposing the forces of homonationalism and the naturalization of settler colonialism. In Native AIDS organizing we find the very root of the premise for the emergence of a decolonizing GLBTQ2 activism, identity, and cultural synergy. Native AIDS activists reclaimed "traditional gender and sexuality while marking settler colonization as a condition of

their own and their communities' vulnerability to AIDS" (203). Thinking through Morgensen's ideas and evidence, we come to realize that GLBTQ2 AIDS organizers laid the groundwork for recent theoretical and political developments in decolonization through their early on-the-ground work as well as their conceptual linking of the colonial condition to issues of heteronormativity, health, and socio-political disenfranchisement.

Spaces between Us is a book of linkages—theoretical, methodological, social, and political. Grasping the linkages requires readers, particularly scholars of sex/gender politics and the colonial condition, to commit to self-reflexivity about their own subject position. Morgensen has given us an inspirational text that is rich in detail and most valuable for thought.

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THE SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Richard T. Rodríguez

On Making Sense: Queer Race Narratives of Intelligibility

Ernesto J. Martínez

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013. xiii + 199 pp.

In his introduction to *On Making Sense*, Ernesto J. Martínez identifies various versions of the theoretical enterprise known as “queer of color critique.” The version with which Martínez finds himself aligned has, as he puts it, “taken on queer theory” by making “a point of addressing (with varying degrees of discomfort and disillusionment) a palpable Eurocentric queer scholarly indifference to the knowledge produced by racial minorities broadly speaking, and by queer people of color specifically” (16). While *On Making Sense* does indeed add to this body

of scholarship given its matching argumentative ambition, I believe Martínez's unique approach to the politics of identity makes his project markedly refreshing and indispensable in its goal to responsibly make sense of experience in struggles for social justice.

Drawing from the insights of thinkers like Paula Moya and Satya Mohanty who advocate a return to realism, Martínez maintains that realist frameworks importantly grant "epistemic privilege" to subjects too often consigned to marginal or invisible status and uphold an "epistemic decolonization" that flies in the face of queer scholarship wishing to eclipse the social world with discourses of instability and unintelligibility. For Martínez, "Realism offers theoretical justification for the disposition to think from the locus of suppressed knowledges and subaltern subjectivities. Realism understands the complexity of engaging identity- and experience-based knowledge (and theory-mediated knowledge broadly speaking) but does not give up on the ideal of objectivity so central to the evaluative claims of antiracist, antihomophobic feminist projects" (13). Martínez's investment in the realist position becomes clear in the first chapter, which functions as an illustrative and measured critique of Judith Butler's "theoretical misappropriation" (25) of Toni Morrison's Nobel Lecture in Literature. Taking issue with what he understands as a faulty evaluation of the preeminent African American writer's lecture, Martínez insists that the queer philosopher's "misreadings" have much to do with her theoretical presuppositions. In Martínez's logic, these misreadings run the serious risk of minimizing the urgency of language and identities particular to the social contexts with which Morrison is deeply concerned. Martínez continues in the same critical vein in chapter 2, a remarkable reading of James Baldwin's novel *Another Country*, which Martínez understands as "anticipat[ing] basic realist theoretical principles but also provid[ing] a provocative version of realist ideas" (48). Though at times hastily dismissive of arguments and textual interpretations that fail to accurately approximate the ethical responsibility of a realist position, Martínez consistently offers convincing suppositions that in the final analysis are nearly impossible to refute.

Beyond his appraisal of work by Morrison and Baldwin, the "queer race narratives" that Martínez examines are broad in focus and diverse in articulation. At the end of chapter 1, Martínez understands Morrison as a "theorist of language and race" whose example signals the "continuity in thinking between communities of color and their queer folk." "If there was such a thing as a 'house of Morrison' (to borrow the language of drag families in ballroom culture)," writes Martínez, "this book might belong to it; this book's readings of queer ethnic literature and cultural production would be the house of Morrison's 'up-and-coming' chil-

dren" (43). These up-and-coming children would certainly be Manuel Muñoz and Randall Kenan, the two queer of color writers whom Martínez reads in chapter 3, and Margaret Cho, who is the focus of chapter 5. What makes Martínez's critical engagement with these cultural producers fascinating is the way "queer enunciation"—that is, the ability to bear witness to queerness—does not always emerge from one's status as a queer subject per se but from a standpoint that "decenters queer speaking subjects" to uphold a politicized position that "distributes narrative responsibility for queer experience and identity" and "enables a deeper understanding of the intersubjective and social contexts in which queer subjects come into being" (113). In other words, these narratives recast the site of queer enunciation (in the sister of a gay man for Muñoz, the grandmother of a deceased grandson for Kenan, and in Cho herself as evidenced in her adoption of "faggot pageantry") and therefore broaden the scope of a community-anchored queerness for which, at the heart, lies a deeply shared concern for resistance and alliance.

While chapters 1 and 2 provide *On Making Sense* with its necessary theoretical scaffolding, chapters 3, 4, and 5 especially highlight Martínez's skilled contributions to debates cutting across Latina/o, queer, and critical ethnic studies. His engagement with the AIDS Project Los Angeles journal *Corpus* in the introduction and with classics such as Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* and Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* in chapter 3, "Queer Latina/o Migrant Labor," illustrates a concern for linking foundational and emergent texts as well as a desire to make sense of the social realities of queer people of color—across generational divides, historical settings, and social locations—demanding to be known.

As the book came to a close, I found myself wanting to read more about Morrison's "'up-and-coming' children" and perhaps even those "children" who have formed houses of their own. I wanted to stay a while longer with Martínez's eloquent prose and also bear witness to how his theoretical framework could be further expanded and possibly even stretched to its limits. It is quite clear that queer of color critique has an important new interlocutor in Ernesto J. Martínez. Anyone invested in moving the enterprise forward would be remiss to overlook *On Making Sense* for how it endeavors to make sense in crucial and responsible ways.

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TRANS TALES OF THE FRONTIER WEST

Don Romesburg

Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past

Peter Boag

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. xii + 257 pp.

Peter Boag, Columbia Chair in the History of the American West at Washington State University, tells a lot of stories about people transgressing gender expectations. Following on his *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest*, this most recent work further cements his position as a leading historian of queer lives in the US West and as a scholar who queers the ways we narrate the region.¹ *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past* recovers gender-diverse peoples and contextualizes them as a sustained, regular part of the nineteenth-century US West. It also suggests how their absence in our understandings of western history relates to how the so-called closing of the frontier was constituted through a “heterosexualized and unambiguously gendered” conceptualization of the American past (3).

Boag recognizes the limitations of his chosen term—“cross-dressers”—to describe male-birth-assigned people who dress and live as women and female-birth-assigned people who dress and live as men. Still, he explains, people used the term at the time for a broad swath of people. In other times and places, his subjects might otherwise be understood as invertes and berdache or, later, transvestites, transsexuals, lesbians and/or homosexuals, or even later, transgender and Two-Spirit. His term also incorporates those who used temporary masquerade to dodge the gender binary's social, cultural, economic, and political constraints. Boag covers a lot of terrain by taking this expansive view of cross-dressing.

In the book's first half, Boag describes the lives and times of cross-dressers across the nineteenth century, showing how mass-media representations of their regular and frequent “discovery” changed over time. For female-to-males (F2M), media rationales, often backed up by testimony from the individuals themselves, involved ease of travel, safety, love of adventure, military service, employment in male-designated jobs, ability to go to places otherwise off-limits to women, or commission of crimes. Many accounts saw the regular appearance of F2M cross-

dressers as a sensational but understandable element of a rough and mobile western environment. It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that newspapers increasingly linked female-bodied-male personas with queer sexualities, the dangers of feminism, and the scientific mysteries of inversion. Male-to-females (M2F), Boag explains, appeared in different ways, as often racialized stage impersonators or through “discovery” as streetwalking sex workers or masquerading men. The latter sometimes claimed to comport themselves as women merely as a lark, but media and the law suspected them of criminalized intent to deceive. By the late nineteenth century, M2F cross-dressers were viewed as potential sexual inverts, although female impersonators continued to be popular on western stages. While Boag explores possibilities for why his many subjects cross-dressed, he is careful to not overdetermine motive even as he honors persistence as historiographically suggestive of what might today be understood as an enduring transgender selfhood.

The book’s second half is a sustained critique of the limited ways in which US western historiography and the American frontier imaginary understands and represents the region’s gender diversity. Boag argues that the convergence of sexology and the closing of the American frontier is significant. American exceptionalism required a conceptualization of the frontier as a space of collective immunization from the sexual perversion, inversion, and decadence related to Old Europe even as it embraced a modernity juxtaposed with the supposedly primitive gender and sexual diversity of Native Americans and other nonwhites. Hegemonic middle-class white manhood came to be linked to gender-exclusive outdoor activities, contact sports, bodybuilding, militarism, and adventure often overlain with yearning for the frontier imaginary. To combat degeneration, medical experts attacked inversion associated with city living and perversion related to primitivism. Popular culture recast the roles of cross-dressing in the US West accordingly. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popular culture reimagined F2M cross-dressers through literary devices that allowed women wronged by men to dress and live like them during a temporary frontier life passage before returning to heterosexual, female-identified, and often feminine settled life. This shored up a progress narrative that both romanticized a masculine, wild, and mobile Old West and affirmed the inevitability of a modern, domesticated, heterosexualized, and gender-normative United States. By contrast, M2F cross-dressers were increasingly understood as belonging neither to the frontier nor to modern America. Popular press coverage of them was almost always viewed through a racial lens, furthering a notion of nonwhites as inherently more prone to feminiza-

tion. Boag asserts that this explains why F2M cross-dressers continued to play a role in narratives of the US West throughout the twentieth century through figures such as Calamity Jane, while M2F cross-dressers appeared only as anomalies.

GLQ readers may long for fewer stories and more engagement with how all this connects to dynamic current scholarship on, for example, settler colonialism and stranger intimacies, processes of transing, queer migration studies, and/or transnational circuits of sexology in relation to the racialization of sexual/gender expression and embodiment. Fair enough. As someone who taught this book in an undergraduate seminar, however, I can testify that Boag's light touch on such concepts worked. My students, seduced by the stories, stayed for the analysis. This facilitated sustained theorizing long after we moved on to other readings. In the end nearly half the class cited *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past* as one of the most influential works of the semester. Boag's extensive research, well-written prose, and careful analysis make this slim volume a worthy addition to the bookshelves of sexuality and gender historians as well as queer and trans studies scholars interested in how narratives of nationalism and lived experiences of gender diversity intersect. Most of all, though, it is a great book for anyone seeking fascinating and moving tales about trans lives forged in unexpected places.

Note

1. Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

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STILL THINKING SEX

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Deviations

Gayle S. Rubin

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Reading Gayle Rubin's influential essays all together brings a special kind of pleasure. Some are good old friends, a few surprising strangers. Together they provide an intellectual history of sexuality studies grounded in the dramatic upheavals in US society since the 1970s. The introduction, "Sex, Gender, Politics," begins with Rubin's personal odyssey as, in her words, a "nerd out of Carolina" (2), moving to Ann Arbor and San Francisco and back to Ann Arbor. Rubin reminds us, using one of her favorite geological metaphors, that texts are like fossils in that we consider both their individual qualities and what they tell us about the environment in which they were formed. The essays are arranged chronologically, the text left as originally published with added notes to provide updated references, a few corrections, and some additional context. As a whole, they remind us not only of how profoundly Rubin has shaped women's studies and queer studies, giving us the concepts of the sex/gender system and the charmed circle of sexuality, but also of the circumstances that have shaped the fields. Deploying another geological image, Rubin points out at the beginning that "durable texts find new meanings in new historical contexts and evolving preoccupations. But as texts are read in new circumstances, the issues that formed them are often forgotten, as the edges of the old landscape are eroded by time" (1).

With that in mind, we move from the classic "The Traffic in Women" to the Paris lesbian world of Renée Vivien and Natalie Barney to another classic, "Thinking Sex," to leather, S/M, and butch to the sex wars to gay communities to queer studies. We see how the three locations that shaped Rubin influenced her thinking. Growing up in a liberal Jewish family in segregated South Carolina taught Rubin about difference. The University of Michigan, where she designed her own undergraduate women's studies major, came out as a lesbian, and drafted "The Traffic in Women" as a term paper, set her on her intellectual path. And San Francisco, where she launched into fieldwork on the gay male leather community,

shifted her focus from gender and feminism to sexuality and queer studies. The one part of her story that, surprisingly, she passes over is the relationship of her decision to write her dissertation on the leather community to her own coming out as a sadomasochist. She describes the research project as the result of a “series of serendipitous events,” having realized that it would be a “really bad idea” (19) to study lesbians because she needed distance between her personal life and her research. But that is all she tells us.

Despite all the changes since the 1970s, both in Rubin’s life and in US society, there is an incredible consistency across time in the essays. This is the case not only for her central concerns with oppression and power but also for her uncanny ability to write accessible and playful prose. In “Rethinking Sex,” for example, she gives us the memorable line: “Sexualities keep marching out of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* and on to the pages of social history” (158). Her use of analogy is both enlightening and amusing. In her essay on S/M, originally published in the *Samois* collection *Coming to Power*, for example, she denounces censorship laws that forbid texts or images designed specifically to arouse sexually by pointing to the fact that “one may embroider for relaxation, play baseball for the thrill, or collect stamps merely for their beauty. But sex itself is not a legitimate activity or goal. It must have some ‘higher’ purpose” (110). And in that same essay, she says that the relationship between heterosexual S/M and “normal” heterosexuality is like the relationship between “high-school faggots and the high-school football team. There is some overlap of personnel, but for the most part, all that fanny-patting and even an occasional blow-job does not make the jocks into fags” (131).

There is a lot of reflection on “Thinking Sex” in the context of the sex wars and the right-wing attacks on sexuality, with Rubin making clear that she was not turning away from feminism but moving toward sexuality studies. In an essay published in *GLQ* in 2010, she says she is most proud of the essay’s “protoqueerness” (222). In her interview by Judith Butler, published in *differences* in 1994, she talks about the impact on her thinking of a unionization drive among lesbian and other sex workers in Ann Arbor in the 1970s. Here she makes clear that talking with the striking sex workers tore her away from the predominant lesbian feminist position that prostitution upheld the patriarchy, and that this was part of the context in which she moved toward the ideas in “Thinking Sex.”

For me, the essay that illustrates most forcefully how much has changed is “Of Catamites and Kings,” published in 1992. It wonderfully situates butch and transsexuality in that time period, and calls perhaps prophetically to “Let a

Thousand Flowers Bloom” (252). Not that the butch/trans border wars are over, or that F2Ms and M2Fs meet no hostility in women’s spaces, but the proliferation of gender and sexual identities, from genderqueer to pansexual, are indeed signs of petals opening.

This is, then, a wonderfully invigorating collection. There is, inevitably, repetition, but the essays as a whole build toward where sexuality studies and queer studies are today. Rubin shows us how far we have come but does not let us forget how much work there still is to do. As she says at the end of the introduction, “I hope someday sex really is marginal.”

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